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DESCRIPTION

SEMICONDUCTOR INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

5 TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to a technology for suppressing variations in the operation speed of various types of semiconductor integrated circuits including a plurality of MOS transistors in which the source and the substrate are separated from each other.

10 BACKGROUND ART

There is a demand for a semiconductor integrated circuit including MOS transistors to operate at a lower voltage because the transistor withstand voltage has been lowering due to process rules becoming finer and so as to meet the demand for reducing the power consumption. However, when operating at lower voltages, the operation speed
15 of a semiconductor integrated circuit typically varies more significantly due to variable factors in the manufacturing process, such as the transistor threshold voltage, the oxide film thickness, the mobility and the process precision, changes in the ambient temperature, etc. Variations in the operation speed decrease the production yield of semiconductor integrated circuits and increase the cost thereof.

20 A conventional approach to reducing variations in the threshold voltage from the manufacturing process is the technology for controlling the substrate voltage of a transistor as disclosed in Japanese Laid-Open Patent Publication No. 9-129831, for example. This is a technology for controlling the substrate potential of a MOS transistor so as to bring the threshold voltage closer to a predetermined voltage value.

25 Expression 1 below shows the relationship between the threshold voltage V_t and the substrate potential V_b of a MOS transistor.

$$V_t = V_{to} + \gamma(\sqrt{\alpha - V_b}) \quad (\text{Expression 1})$$

In Expression 1, V_{to} , α and γ are each a constant dependent on how successful the manufacturing process was. V_b is the voltage difference between the source of the MOS transistor and the substrate, and the difference is referred to as the "substrate potential". It can be seen from Expression 1 that the threshold voltage V_t increases or decreases when the substrate potential V_b is controlled to be a negative voltage or a positive voltage, respectively. Referring to FIG. 14, the relationship between the variation in the threshold voltage V_t and the control voltage of the substrate potential V_b will be described briefly. Consider how to control the threshold voltage V_t to be always at a predetermined value V_1 for a variation range (V_1- to V_1+) of the threshold voltage V_t . The threshold voltage V_t can be adjusted to the predetermined value V_1 by controlling the substrate potential V_b to be 0 V, V_- (V) or V_+ (V) when the threshold voltage V_t is equal to V_1 (the predetermined value), V_1- (the lower limit of the variation range) or V_1+ (the upper limit of the variation range), respectively. This can be done with a circuit configuration in which the predetermined value V_1 is produced as a reference voltage, and the substrate potential V_b is adjusted by a feedback control so that the threshold voltage V_t of the MOS transistor is equal to the predetermined value V_1 .

With this conventional approach using such a configuration, it is possible to suppress variations in the threshold voltage V_t .

Problems To Be Solved

However, the operation speed of a semiconductor integrated circuit using MOS transistors is varied not only by the threshold voltage V_t , but also by other variable factors in the manufacturing process (such as the oxide film thickness, the mobility and the process precision), changes in the ambient temperature around the semiconductor integrated circuit, and variations in the operating power supply voltage precision.

Variations in the operation speed of a MOS transistor circuit will now be described briefly.

Expression 2 below represents the operation speed (delay time) of a MOS transistor circuit.

5 $\tau = C \cdot V_{dd} / I_{ds}$ (Expression 2)

In Expression 2 above, τ is the delay time of a MOS transistor circuit such as a logic gate, C is the load capacitance, V_{dd} is the operating power supply voltage of the MOS transistor circuit, I_{ds} is the saturation current value of the MOS transistor under the operating power supply voltage. Therefore, in order to keep the operation speed of a MOS transistor circuit constant, it is important to suppress variations in the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors.

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Typically, the saturation current of a MOS transistor is as shown in Expression 3 below.

$$I_{ds} = (1/2) \mu C_{ox} (W/L) (V_{dd} - V_t)^2 \quad \text{(Expression 3)}$$

15 In Expression 3 above, I_{ds} is the saturation current value of a MOS transistor, μ is the mobility, C_{ox} is the gate capacitance per unit area, W is the gate width of the MOS transistor, L is the gate length of the MOS transistor, V_{dd} is the operating power supply voltage of the MOS transistor circuit, and V_t is the threshold voltage of the MOS transistor.

As can be seen from Expression 3 above, the saturation current I_{ds} of a MOS transistor may vary depending on a number of variable factors, in addition to the threshold voltage V_t , such as the mobility μ (which is dependent on the ion dose precision), the gate capacitance C_{ox} (which is dependent on the gate oxide film thickness precision), and the value W/L (which is dependent on the process precision). Moreover, the saturation current I_{ds} of a MOS transistor may also be varied by changes in the threshold voltage V_t or the mobility μ caused by the ambient temperature during operation of the MOS transistor.

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Referring to FIG. 13(a), FIG. 13(b) and FIG. 13(c), how the saturation current I_{ds} of a MOS transistor is varied by the variable factors will now be described.

FIG. 13(a) shows the saturation current I_{ds} of a MOS transistor with respect to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} where only the threshold voltage V_t shown in Expression 3 varies. If the threshold voltage V_t is higher than a predetermined medium value of the threshold voltage V_t , the curve shifts in the positive direction in which the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} increases, thereby lowering the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistor at an operating power supply voltage V_{dd1} . If the threshold voltage V_t is lower than the predetermined medium value of the threshold voltage V_t , the curve shifts in the negative direction in which the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} decreases, thereby increasing the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistor at the operating power supply voltage V_{dd1} .

FIG. 13(b) shows the saturation current I_{ds} of a MOS transistor with respect to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} where the value $\mu C_{ox} (W/L)$ in shown in Expression 3 varies. If the value $\mu C_{ox}(W/L)$ is larger than a predetermined medium value thereof, the gradient of the parabolic curve increases, thereby increasing the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistor at the operating power supply voltage V_{dd1} . If the value $\mu C_{ox}(W/L)$ is smaller than the predetermined medium value thereof, the gradient of the parabolic curve decreases, thereby decreasing the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistor at the operating power supply voltage V_{dd1} .

FIG. 13(c) shows the saturation current I_{ds} of a MOS transistor with respect to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} where the ambient temperature varies. In Expression 3, the mobility μ and the threshold voltage V_t are temperature-dependent, and they both typically decrease as the temperature increases. Therefore, under a relatively high operating power supply voltage V_{dd1} , where a decrease in the mobility μ has greater influence, if the temperature increases, the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS

transistor decreases. However, under a relatively low operating power supply voltage V_{dd2} , where a decrease in the threshold voltage V_t has greater influence, if the temperature increases, the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistor increases. Thus, the saturation current value I_{ds} is influenced by a change in the temperature differently depending on the operating power supply voltage value V_{dd} .

As described above, the saturation current value I_{ds} of a MOS transistor may vary depending on a number of variable factors other than the threshold voltage V_t . Therefore, it can be seen that the conventional approach in which variations in the threshold voltage V_t are suppressed may not sufficiently suppress variations in the operation speed of a MOS transistor circuit.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a semiconductor integrated circuit in which variations in the operation speed of a main circuit including a MOS transistor are effectively suppressed, despite variations in variable factors, including not only the threshold voltage V_t , but also other factors in the manufacturing process of the MOS transistor, e.g., the mobility μ , the gate capacitance C_{ox} per unit area, and the ratio W/L between the gate width W and the gate length L , and changes in the operating ambient temperature, thus improving the production yield and the operation speed of the semiconductor integrated circuit.

In order to achieve the object set forth above, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit in which the actual saturation current value of a MOS transistor of a main circuit thereof is controlled to be substantially at a constant value, thus suppressing variations thereof, thereby improving the operation speed of the semiconductor integrated circuit.

Specifically, a semiconductor integrated circuit of the present invention is a

semiconductor integrated circuit, including: a main circuit including a plurality of transistors of a MOS structure in which a source potential and a substrate potential are separated from each other, and operating while receiving a predetermined operating power supply voltage; and a substrate potential control circuit for controlling the substrate potential of each MOS transistor of the main circuit, wherein: a target saturation current value of the MOS transistor under the operating power supply voltage value of the main circuit is set in the substrate potential control circuit; and the substrate potential control circuit controls the substrate potential of each MOS transistor of the main circuit so that an actual saturation current value of the MOS transistor under the operating power supply voltage value of the main circuit is equal to the target saturation current value.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, where a predetermined operating power supply voltage of the main circuit varies within a predetermined operating voltage range, the target saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is proportional to the operating power supply voltage value within the operating voltage range.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, where a predetermined operating power supply voltage of the main circuit varies within a predetermined operating voltage range, the target saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is in a linear function relationship with the operating power supply voltage value within the operating voltage range.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the main circuit has a plurality of operating power supply voltage ranges; the target saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is in a linear function relationship with the operating power supply voltage value within an operating voltage range for each operating power supply voltage range of the main circuit; and the linear function relationship between the target saturation current value and the operating power supply voltage value is

different for each operating power supply voltage range.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the substrate potential control circuit controls the substrate potential of an nMOS transistor or that of a pMOS transistor among all the MOS transistors of the main circuit.

5 A semiconductor integrated circuit of the present invention is a semiconductor integrated circuit, including: a main circuit including a plurality of transistors of a MOS structure in which a source potential and a substrate potential are separated from each other, and operating while receiving a predetermined operating power supply voltage; and a substrate potential control circuit for controlling the substrate potential of each MOS
10 transistor of the main circuit so that an actual saturation current value of the MOS transistor under the operating power supply voltage value of the main circuit is equal to a target saturation current value, the substrate potential control circuit, including: a constant current generation circuit; a current-voltage conversion circuit including a MOS transistor provided therein and having current-voltage conversion characteristics that change
15 according to the substrate potential of the MOS transistor provided therein for converting a constant current value of the constant current generation circuit to a voltage value; and a differential amplifier circuit for controlling a substrate potential of the current-voltage conversion circuit so that the converted voltage value from the current-voltage conversion circuit is equal to the predetermined operating power supply voltage value of the main
20 circuit, wherein the substrate potential control circuit controls the substrate potential of each MOS transistor of the main circuit so that the substrate potential is equal to the substrate potential of the current-voltage conversion circuit controlled by the differential amplifier circuit.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, where the
25 predetermined operating power supply voltage of the main circuit varies within a predetermined operating voltage range, the constant current value of the constant current

generation circuit is proportional to the operating power supply voltage value within the operating voltage range.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, where the predetermined operating power supply voltage of the main circuit varies within a predetermined operating voltage range, the constant current value of the constant current generation circuit is in a linear function relationship with the operating power supply voltage value within the operating voltage range.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the main circuit has a plurality of operating power supply voltage ranges; the constant current value of the constant current generation circuit is in a linear function relationship with an operating power supply voltage value within an operating voltage range for each operating power supply voltage range of the main circuit; and the linear function relationship between the constant current value of the constant current generation circuit and the operating power supply voltage value is different for each operating power supply voltage range.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the constant current generation circuit generates a plurality of constant current values, and selectively outputs one of the plurality of constant current values.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the constant current generation circuit generates a constant current with a variation rate smaller than that for the actual saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the constant current generation circuit includes an adjustment circuit for reducing variations in the generated constant current value.

A semiconductor integrated circuit of the present invention is a semiconductor integrated circuit, including: a main circuit including a plurality of transistors of a MOS structure, and operating while receiving an operating power supply voltage; and a power

supply voltage control circuit for controlling the operating power supply voltage supplied to the main circuit, wherein: a target saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is set in the power supply voltage control circuit; and the power supply voltage control circuit controls a voltage value of the operating power supply voltage supplied to the main circuit so that an actual saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is equal to the target saturation current value.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the target saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is a target saturation current value of an nMOS transistor or that of a pMOS transistor from among the MOS transistors of the main circuit, or is an average value between the target saturation current values of the nMOS and pMOS transistors.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the target saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is in a linear function relationship with the operating power supply voltage supplied to the main circuit.

In one embodiment of the semiconductor integrated circuit, the main circuit includes a plurality of operating power supply voltage ranges; the target saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is in a linear function relationship with an operating power supply voltage value within an operating voltage range for each operating power supply voltage range of the main circuit; the linear function relationship between the target saturation current value and the operating power supply voltage value is different for each operating power supply voltage range.

Thus, in the present invention, while the operation speed (delay time) of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is a function of the saturation current of the MOS transistors, the substrate potential control circuit controls the substrate potential of the MOS transistors so that the actual saturation current of the MOS transistors is equal to the target saturation current value during the operation of the main circuit. Therefore, even if

the threshold voltage, the mobility μ , the gate capacitance C_{ox} per unit area or the ratio W/L between the gate width W and the gate length L varies due to variations in the manufacturing process of the MOS transistors or changes in the ambient temperature occur during the operation of the main circuit, the saturation current of the MOS transistors, which would otherwise vary due to such variations or changes, is controlled to be substantially constant, whereby variations in the operation speed of the MOS transistors of the main circuit are effectively suppressed.

Moreover, in the present invention, while the operation speed of the MOS transistors is proportional to the relationship (V_{dd}/I_{ds}) between the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} and the actual saturation current I_{ds} of the MOS transistors, as can be seen from Expression 2, even if the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit varies, the target saturation current value is changed in proportion to the variation, whereby variations in the operation speed of the MOS transistors due to changes in the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit can also be suppressed effectively. This is particularly advantageous for inverter circuits.

Particularly, in the present invention, the relationship between the target saturation current value and the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit is set to be a linear function relationship, whereby the operation speed of the main circuit can be controlled to be substantially at a constant value, whereby variations in the operation speed can be suppressed even more effectively. This is particularly advantageous for memory devices and multi-level stacked logic circuits.

Moreover, in the present invention, where the main circuit has a plurality of operating power supply voltage ranges selectively used depending on the operation mode, or the like, the relationship between the target saturation current value and the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit is set to be a linear function relationship separately for each operating power supply voltage range, whereby variations in the

operation speed can be effectively suppressed for each of the operating power supply voltage ranges of the main circuit. This is particularly advantageous for main circuits having different operating power supply voltages for different operation modes.

In addition, in the present invention, the variation rate for the target saturation current value is sufficiently smaller than that for the saturation current of the MOS transistors where it is not controlled, whereby variations in the operation speed of the main circuit can be suppressed.

Moreover, in the present invention, since an adjustment circuit for reducing the variations in the target saturation current value is provided, the variations in the target saturation current value are even more restricted by the adjustment circuit, whereby variations in the operation speed of the main circuit can be even more suppressed.

Furthermore, in the present invention, even if various factors such as the gate capacitance per unit area, the gate width and the mobility vary due to variations in the manufacturing process of the MOS transistors provided in the main circuit, the delay time can be kept constant, and a design with a small margin is made possible. Therefore, it is not necessary to, as in the prior art, set the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit to be high taking into consideration variations in various factors such as the mobility, and the operating power supply voltage can be determined with only a small power supply margin, whereby the main circuit can be operated at a low voltage, thus further reducing the power consumption. Particularly, in the present invention, an operating power supply voltage with a small power supply margin is set for each of the operating power supply voltage ranges corresponding to various operation modes of the main circuit, whereby the main circuit can be operated at a low voltage in all of the operation modes, thus further reducing the power consumption.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows a basic configuration of a semiconductor integrated circuit according to the first embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2(a) to FIG. 2(d) each show the relationship between the target saturation current value and the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit, wherein FIG. 2(a) shows a case where the target saturation current value is constant in the operating voltage range of the main circuit, FIG. 2(b) a case where the target saturation current value is proportional to the operating power supply voltage in the operating voltage range of the main circuit, FIG. 2(c) a case where the target saturation current value is proportional to the operating power supply voltage with a predetermined offset in the operating voltage range of the main circuit, and FIG. 2(d) a case where the main circuit has two operating voltage ranges.

FIG. 3 shows a specific configuration of a substrate potential control circuit provided in the semiconductor integrated circuit of the first embodiment.

FIG. 4 shows an exemplary specific configuration of the main circuit provided in the semiconductor integrated circuit.

FIG. 5 shows a substrate potential control circuit for controlling, by using the substrate potential, the actual saturation current of the nMOS transistors of the main circuit of the semiconductor integrated circuit.

FIG. 6 shows a substrate potential control circuit for controlling, by using the substrate potential, the actual saturation current of the pMOS transistors of the main circuit of the semiconductor integrated circuit.

FIG. 7(a) shows an internal configuration of a constant current generation circuit provided in the substrate potential control circuit, FIG. 7(b) a first variation of the constant current generation circuit, FIG. 7(c) a second variation of the constant current generation circuit, and FIG. 7(d) a third variation of the constant current generation circuit.

FIG. 8(a) to FIG. 8(d) each show the relationship between the constant current

value of the constant current generation circuit and the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit, wherein FIG. 8(a) shows a case where the constant current value is constant in the operating voltage range of the main circuit, FIG. 8(b) a case where the constant current value is proportional to the operating power supply voltage in the operating voltage range of the main circuit, FIG. 8(c) a case where the constant current value is proportional to the operating power supply voltage with a predetermined offset in the operating voltage range of the main circuit, and FIG. 8(d) a case where the main circuit has two operating voltage ranges.

FIG. 9(a) shows an internal configuration of a constant current generation circuit capable of adjusting the output current value, and FIG. 9(b) shows a first variation of the constant current generation circuit.

FIG. 10(a) to FIG. 10(c) each show a configuration of a current-voltage conversion circuit provided in the substrate potential control circuit for controlling the substrate voltage of the nMOS transistors of the main circuit, wherein FIG. 10(a) shows a basic configuration, FIG. 10(b) a first variation thereof, and FIG. 10(c) a second variation thereof.

FIG. 11(a) shows the relationship between the substrate potential of a MOS transistor of the main circuit and the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit with respect to variable factors such as the temperature where the actual saturation current of the MOS transistor is controlled to be a constant value, and FIG. 11(b) shows the relationship between the substrate potential of a MOS transistor of the current-voltage conversion circuit and the output voltage required for the current-voltage conversion circuit with respect to variable factors such as the temperature where the saturation current of the MOS transistor is controlled to be a constant value.

FIG. 12(a) to FIG. 12(c) each show a configuration of a current-voltage conversion circuit provided in the substrate potential control circuit for the pMOS

transistors of the main circuit, wherein FIG. 12(a) shows a basic configuration, FIG. 12(b) a first variation thereof, and FIG. 12(c) a second variation thereof.

FIG. 13(a) to FIG. 13(c) each show the characteristics of the saturation current with respect to the operating power supply voltage in a MOS transistor, wherein FIG. 13(a) shows the characteristics where the threshold voltage varies, FIG. 13(b) the characteristics where $\mu C_{ox}(W/L)$ (where μ is the mobility, C_{ox} the gate capacitance per unit area, W the gate width of the MOS transistor and L the gate length thereof) varies, and FIG. 13(c) the characteristics where the ambient temperature varies.

FIG. 14 shows the relationship between the threshold voltage and the substrate potential of a MOS transistor.

FIG. 15 shows a basic configuration of a semiconductor integrated circuit according to the second embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 16 shows an internal configuration of a power supply voltage control circuit provided in the semiconductor integrated circuit of the second embodiment.

FIG. 17 shows an exemplary specific configuration of the power supply voltage control circuit.

FIG. 18 shows another exemplary specific configuration of the power supply voltage control circuit.

FIG. 19 shows still another exemplary specific configuration of the power supply voltage control circuit.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

A semiconductor integrated circuit according to an embodiment of the present invention will now be described with reference to the drawings.

(First Embodiment)

FIG. 1 shows a configuration of the semiconductor integrated circuit of the present embodiment. In the figure, reference numeral 2 denotes a main circuit that operates while receiving the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} and includes a large number of MOS transistors (not shown). The source of each of these MOS transistors is not electrically connected to the substrate, whereby the source potential and the substrate potential are separated from each other.

Reference numeral 1 denotes a substrate potential control circuit that is receiving information on the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 and information on the target saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2 operating under the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} . The substrate potential control circuit 1 controls the substrate potential V_b of the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2 so that the actual saturation current of the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2 under the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 is equal to the given target saturation current value I_{ds} .

Thus, the substrate potential control circuit 1 controls the substrate potential V_b so that the actual saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2 is always equal to the target saturation current value I_{ds} , whereby the main circuit 2 always operates at a constant operation speed even if there are variations in the MOS transistor manufacturing process or changes in the temperature.

Thus, a feature of the present embodiment is that the variations in the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors themselves, which determine the delay time τ shown in Expression 2 above, are suppressed by controlling the substrate potential of the MOS transistors.

FIG. 2(a) to FIG. 2(d) show various examples of the relationship between the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 in the semiconductor integrated circuit shown in FIG. 1 and the target saturation current value I_{ds} .

FIG. 2(a) shows an example where the target saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors is kept constant, irrespective of the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2. As shown in Expression 2 above, the delay time τ of a MOS transistor circuit increases in proportion to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} assuming that the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors is constant. However, in a case where the precision of the power supply voltage of the main circuit 2 is high, the delay time varies little, whereby the present embodiment is very effective.

FIG. 2(b) shows an example where the relationship between the target saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 is proportional. With this relationship, there is provided a significant advantage that the operation speed of the main circuit 2 can be kept substantially constant even if the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 changes. As can be seen from Expression 2 above, in order to keep the operation speed of a MOS transistor circuit constant, it is of course preferred to reduce the variations in the saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors, but it is more preferred that the saturation current value I_{ds} , which is proportional to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} as shown in Expression 5, is used as a target value.

$$I_{ds} = k \cdot V_{dd} \quad (\text{Expression 5})$$

In Expression 5, I_{ds} is the saturation current value of the MOS transistors, k is a constant, and V_{dd} is the operating power supply voltage of the main circuit 2. Substituting Expression 5 into Expression 2 yields that the delay time τ is equal to C/k , indicating that it is possible to obtain a constant operation speed, independent of variations in the characteristics of the MOS transistors, changes in the temperature, and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} . Note however that Expression 2 is an approximate expression effective for simple logic circuits such as inverter circuits.

In a memory device, a multi-level stacked logic circuit, or the like, the delay

time τ influences not only the saturation currents of the MOS transistors stacked together but also on the ON resistances thereof. Therefore, it is preferred to determine, on a circuit by circuit basis, an optimal linear relationship for obtaining an operation speed that is constant against changes in the operating power supply voltage, as shown in FIG. 2(c).

FIG. 2(c) shows an example where the relationship between the target saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 is a proportional relationship with an offset current I_{ds0} .

FIG. 2(d) shows that where the main circuit 2 has a plurality of (two in the figure) operating power supply voltage ranges, the target saturation current value I_{ds} is in a linear function relationship with the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 for each of the first and second operating power supply voltage ranges and that the linear function relationships (the gradients of the linear functions) of the operating power supply voltage ranges are different from each other. In a case where there are, for example, two operating power supply voltages V_{dd} to be applied to the main circuit 2 and each operating power supply voltage is associated with a different operation speed, the relationship as shown by the graph of FIG. 2(d) is more advantageous in terms of the power consumption, particularly, the reduction in the transistor leak current.

FIG. 3 shows an exemplary specific configuration of the substrate potential control circuit 1 in the semiconductor integrated circuit shown in FIG. 1. The semiconductor integrated circuit shown in FIG. 3 includes the substrate potential control circuit 1 and the main circuit 2, as does that shown in FIG. 1.

The substrate potential control circuit 1 includes a constant current generation circuit 1-1, a substrate potential generation circuit 1-2 and a current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3. The current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3 includes a MOS transistor provided therein, and the current-voltage conversion characteristics thereof can be changed by changing the substrate potential V_b of the MOS transistor provided therein. The

constant current generation circuit 1-1 outputs a constant current I_d , and the constant current I_d is input to the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3. The current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3 converts the constant current I_d to a voltage V_d , and outputs the voltage V_d to the substrate potential generation circuit 1-2. The substrate potential generation circuit 1-2 receives the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 and the converted voltage V_d from the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3, and outputs a signal of the substrate potential V_b to the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3 so that the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} and the converted voltage V_d are equal to each other, and the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3 changes the current-voltage conversion characteristics thereof based on the received substrate potential V_b . The substrate potential V_b generated by the substrate potential generation circuit 1-2 is supplied to the main circuit 2 as the substrate potential V_b of the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2.

The substrate potential control circuit 1 shown in FIG. 3 is effective in controlling the substrate potentials of both nMOS transistors and pMOS transistors of the main circuit 2. Next, the substrate potential control circuit for the nMOS transistors of the main circuit 2 and the substrate potential control circuit for the pMOS transistors of the main circuit 2 will be described separately for the sake of simplicity.

First, an exemplary internal configuration of the main circuit 2 will be described with reference to FIG. 4. The figure shows a case where the main circuit 2 is made up of a plurality of inverter circuits I_1, I_2, \dots . Reference numerals $2n-1$ to $2n-2$ denote the nMOS transistors in which the source potential and the substrate potential are separated from each other, and reference numerals $2p-1$ to $2p-2$ similarly denote the pMOS transistors in which the source potential and the substrate potential are separated from each other. A potential V_{bn} is provided as the substrate potential of the nMOS transistors $2n-1$ to $2n-2$, and a potential V_{bp} is provided as the substrate potential of the pMOS transistors

2p-1 to 2p-2. As shown in Expression 1 above, the threshold voltage V_{tn} of the nMOS transistors **2n-1 to 2n-2** can be changed by controlling the substrate potential V_{bn} , and the threshold voltage V_{tp} of the pMOS transistors **2p-1 to 2p-2** can be changed by controlling the substrate potential V_{bp} . Therefore, the saturation current $I_{ds(n)}$ of the nMOS transistors **2n-1 to 2n-2** and the saturation current $I_{ds(p)}$ of the pMOS transistors **2p-1 to 2p-2** can also be changed by controlling the substrate potentials V_{bn} and V_{bp} , respectively.

Next, FIG. 5 shows a semiconductor integrated circuit, showing an exemplary internal configuration of a substrate potential control circuit **1-1** for controlling the saturation current of the nMOS transistors **2n-1 to 2n-2** of the main circuit **2**. The structure shown in FIG. 5 includes the main circuit **2** including the nMOS transistors **2n-1 to 2n-2**, and the substrate potential control circuit **1n** for the nMOS transistors **2n-1 to 2n-2** of the main circuit **2**, as does that shown in FIG. 1. The substrate potential control circuit **1n** includes a constant current source (constant current generation circuit) **1n-1**, an operational amplifier (differential amplifier) **1n-2** and a current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3**. A constant current I_{dn} output from the constant current source **1n-1** is given to the current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3**. The current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3** converts the constant current I_{dn} output from the constant current source **1n-1** to a voltage V_{dn} based on predetermined current-voltage conversion characteristics. The operational amplifier **1n-2** receives the converted voltage V_{dn} from the current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3** and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2**, controls the substrate potential V_{bn} of the current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3** so that the voltages V_{dn} and V_{dd} are equal to each other, and supplies the controlled substrate potential V_{bn} also to the main circuit **2** as the substrate potential V_{bn} of the nMOS transistors **2n-1 to 2n-2** of the main circuit **2**.

The current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3** includes an nMOS transistor **3n-1**. It is preferred that the nMOS transistor **3n-1** is such that the characteristics between the

substrate potential V_{bn} thereof and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} are equal to those of the nMOS transistors **2n-1** to **2n-2** used in the main circuit **2**. For example, where the gate length L is $0.13\ \mu\text{m}$, the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} is $1.5\ \text{V}$ and $W/L=3\ \mu\text{m}/0.13\ \mu\text{m}$ in the nMOS transistors **2n-1** to **2n-2** of the main circuit **2**, if the saturation current value $I_{ds(n)}$ is $2\ \text{mA}$, it is preferred that the nMOS transistor **3n-1** used in the current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3** has a size of $W/L=3\ \mu\text{m}/0.13\ \mu\text{m}$. In the nMOS transistor **3n-1** of the current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3**, the gate and the drain are directly connected to each other, and the constant current I_{dn} generated in the constant current generation circuit **1n-1** is output from the drain side. As for the constant current value I_{dn} , since the saturation current value $I_{ds(n)}$ of the nMOS transistors **2n-1** to **2n-2** of the main circuit **2** is $2\ \text{mA}@1.5\ \text{V}$ in the numeric example shown above, the target saturation current value is set to $2\ \text{mA}@1.5\ \text{V}$.

The operational amplifier **1n-2** controls the substrate potential V_{bn} of the nMOS transistor **3n-1** of the current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3** so that the converted voltage V_{dn} output from the current-voltage conversion circuit **1n-3** is equal to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2**. The controlled substrate potential V_{bn} is also supplied to the main circuit **2** as the substrate potential V_{bn} of the nMOS transistors **2n-1** to **2n-2** of the main circuit **2**. Therefore, the substrate potential V_{bn} of the nMOS transistors **2n-1** to **2n-2** of the main circuit **2** is controlled so that the actual saturation current $I_{ds(n)}$ of the nMOS transistors **2n-1** to **2n-2** of the main circuit **2** when the operating power supply voltage $V_{dd}=1.5\ \text{V}$ is $2\ \text{mA}$. Where the constant current I_{dn} of the constant current source **1n-1** stays constant, independent of changes in the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} , the saturation current value $I_{ds(n)}$ of the nMOS transistors **2n-1** to **2n-2** of the main circuit **2** is controlled to be a constant value, independent of the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} .

Next, a configuration of the substrate potential control circuit **1** for controlling

the saturation current of the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2** of the main circuit **2** will be described with reference to FIG. 6.

The structure shown in FIG. 6 includes the main circuit **2** including the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2**, and a substrate potential control circuit **1p** for the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2**, as does that shown in FIG. 1. The substrate potential control circuit **1p** includes a constant current source **1p-1**, an operational amplifier **1p-2** and a current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3** including a pMOS transistor **3p-1** therein. A constant current I_{dp} output from the constant current source **1p-1** is given to the current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3**. The operational amplifier **1p-2** controls the substrate potential V_{bp} of the pMOS transistor **3p-1** of the current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3** so that a converted voltage V_{dp} from the current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3** is equal to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2**, and supplies the controlled substrate potential V_{bp} also to the main circuit **2** as the substrate potential V_{bp} of the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2** of the main circuit **2**.

It is preferred that the pMOS transistor **3p-1** in the current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3** is such that the relationship characteristics between the substrate potential V_{bp} and the saturation current value $I_{ds(p)}$ are equal to those of the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2** of the main circuit **2**. For example, where the gate length L is $0.13\ \mu\text{m}$, the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} is $1.5\ \text{V}$ and $W/L=3\ \mu\text{m}/0.13\ \mu\text{m}$ in the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2** of the main circuit **2**, if the saturation current value $I_{ds(p)}$ is $1\ \text{mA}$, it is preferred that the pMOS transistor **3p-1** used in the current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3** has a size of $W/L=3\ \mu\text{m}/0.13\ \mu\text{m}$. In the pMOS transistor **3p-1** of the current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3**, the gate and the drain are directly connected to each other, and the constant current I_{dp} generated in the constant current source circuit **1p-1** is output from the source side. As for the constant current value I_{dp} , since the saturation current value $I_{ds(p)}$ of the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2** of the main circuit **2** is $1\ \text{mA}$ in the

numeric example shown above, the target saturation current value is set to 1 mA@1.5 V.

In the substrate potential control circuit **1p**, the operational amplifier **1p-2** controls the substrate potential V_{bp} of the pMOS transistor **3p-1** of the current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3** so that the converted voltage V_{dp} from the current-voltage conversion circuit **1p-3** is equal to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} , and the controlled substrate potential V_{bp} is supplied also to the main circuit **2** as the substrate potential V_{bp} of the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2** of the main circuit **2**. Therefore, in the main circuit **2**, the substrate potential V_{bp} is controlled so that the actual saturation current $I_{ds(p)}$ of the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2** is 1 mA when the operating power supply voltage $V_{dd} = 1.5$ V. Where the constant current I_{dp} of the constant current source **1p-1** stays constant, independent of changes in the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} , the saturation current $I_{ds(p)}$ of the pMOS transistors **2p-1** to **2p-2** is controlled to be a constant value, independent of changes in the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2**.

(Variations Of Constant Current Generation Circuit Of Substrate Potential Control Circuit)

FIG. 7(a) to FIG. 7(d) each show a variation of the constant current generation circuit **1-1** of the substrate potential control circuit **1**. These constant current generation circuits can be used as either the constant current generation circuit **1n-1** or **1p-1**.

A constant current generation circuit **1-1a** of FIG. 7(a) is an exemplary circuit for always keeping the target saturation current value I_{ds} at a constant value in an operating power supply voltage range including the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2**. The relationship between the operating power supply voltage of the present circuit and a constant current value I_d (target saturation current value) of the constant current generation circuit **1-1a** is shown in FIG. 8(a). The constant current

generation circuit **1-1a** of FIG. 7(a) includes a reference voltage generation circuit **11**, an operational amplifier **21**, a resistor **31** having a resistance value R and two pMOS transistors **41** and **42**. A voltage V_o higher than the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} is supplied to the sources of the pMOS transistors **41** and **42**, and one end of the resistor **31** is connected to the pMOS transistor **41**, with the other end of the resistor **31** being grounded. The drain of the other pMOS transistor **42** is the output terminal of the present circuit **1-1a**. The operational amplifier **21** controls the gate of the pMOS transistor **41** so that the voltage value at one end of the resistor **31** different from the grounded end is equal to an output voltage value V_r of the reference voltage generation circuit **11**. The pMOS transistors **41** and **42** have the same size, and currents of the same value flow through the pMOS transistors **41** and **42**, whereby the pMOS transistor **42** outputs the constant current I_d ($I_d = V_r/R$).

FIG. 7(b) to FIG. 7(d) show other variations of constant current generation circuits **1-1b** to **1-1d**. The value of the constant current I_d , i.e., the target saturation current value I_{ds} , is not always kept constant, but is changed to a plurality of values according to changes in the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2**, and one constant voltage value is selected and output, from among the plurality of values, according to the actual operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2**.

Specifically, the constant current generation circuit **1-1b** of FIG. 7(b) is an exemplary circuit in which the target saturation current value I_{ds} and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2** are proportional to each other for the operating power supply voltage range of the main circuit **2**. The relationship between the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the present circuit and the target saturation current value (the constant current value I_d of the constant current generation circuit **1-1a**) is shown in FIG. 8(b).

The constant current generation circuit **1-1b** of FIG. 7(b) includes the

operational amplifier 21, the resistor 31 having a resistance value R , the two pMOS transistors 41 and 42 and two nMOS transistors 51 and 52. The operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 is supplied to one end of the resistor 31. A voltage V_o higher than the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} is supplied to the sources of the pMOS transistors 41 and 42, and a predetermined negative voltage $-V_s$ is supplied to the sources of the nMOS transistors 51 and 52. The operational amplifier 21 controls the gates of the two nMOS transistors 51 and 52 so that the other end of the resistor 31 has a ground potential V_{ss} , i.e., 0 V. Where the nMOS transistors 51 and 52 have the same size and the pMOS transistors 41 and 42 also have the same size, currents of the same value flow through all the transistors, whereby the pMOS transistor 42 outputs the current I_d ($I_d = V_{dd}/R$). With the circuit shown in FIG. 7(b), the target saturation current value I_d is proportional to the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2.

The constant current generation circuit 1-1c of FIG. 7(c) is an exemplary circuit in which the target saturation current value I_{ds} and the power supply voltage value of the main circuit 2 are in a linear function relationship for the operating power supply voltage range of the main circuit 2. The relationship between the power supply voltage of the present circuit and the saturation current is shown in FIG. 8(c).

The constant current generation circuit 1-1c of FIG. 7(c) is substantially the same circuit as that of FIG. 7(b), except that a negative voltage $-V_1$ is supplied to the operational amplifier 21 in FIG. 7(c) whereas the ground potential V_{ss} is input to the operational amplifier 21 in FIG. 7(b). Therefore, in FIG. 7(c), the operational amplifier 21 controls the gates of the nMOS transistors 51 and 52 so that the other end of the resistor 31 is at the negative voltage $-V_1$. Where the nMOS transistors 51 and 52 have the same size and the pMOS transistors 41 and 42 have the same size, currents of the same value flow through all the transistors, whereby the pMOS transistor 42 outputs the current I_d ($I_d = (V_{dd} + V_1)/R$).

The constant current generation circuit **1-1d** of FIG. **7(d)** is an exemplary circuit in which for each of two or more different operating power supply voltage ranges of the main circuit, the target saturation current value I_{ds} and the operating power supply voltage value of the main circuit **2** are in a proportional relationship, and the proportional relationship (the gradient of the linear function) is different for each operating power supply voltage range. The relationship between the operating power supply voltage of the present circuit and the saturation current is shown in FIG. **8(d)**.

The constant current generation circuit **1-1d** of FIG. **7(d)** additionally includes two resistors **32** and **33** having resistance values R_1 and R_2 ($R_1 < R_2$) and two switches **61** and **62**, as compared with the circuit of FIG. **7(b)**. If the first operating power supply voltage range is a high voltage range, only the switch **61** for the resistor **32** is turned ON, and if the second operating power supply voltage range is a low voltage range, only the switch **62** for the resistor **33** is turned ON. Therefore, the constant current I_d ($I_d = V_{dd}/R_1$) is obtained in the case of the first operating voltage range and the constant current I_d ($I_d = V_{dd}/R_2$) is obtained in the case of the second operating voltage range. Since $R_1 < R_2$, characteristics as shown in FIG. **8(d)** are obtained.

Providing the constant current generation circuits **1-1a** to **1-1d** shown in FIG. **7(a)** to FIG. **7(d)** as the constant current generation circuit **1-1** of FIG. **3**, it is possible to realize various relationships as shown in FIG. **2(a)** to FIG. **2(d)**.

The present invention is meaningless unless the variation rate of the target saturation current value of a MOS transistor is made smaller than that of the actual saturation current value thereof. However, resistors formed by a semiconductor process vary by about 20% depending on how successful the process was, whereby it is necessary to take some measures with the circuit.

FIG. **9(a)** and FIG. **9(b)** each show a constant current generation circuit having an adjustment circuit capable of further increasing the absolute precision of the target

saturation current value I_{ds} .

FIG. 9(a) shows a configuration of a constant current generation circuit in which the absolute precision of the resistance value is increased, thereby making it possible to adjust the output current. FIG. 9(a) is substantially the same as FIG. 7(b), except that a resistor 34 is a variable resistor. The resistance value of the variable resistor (adjustment circuit) 34 can be set to any value by adjusting the coefficient α . Therefore, the constant current I_d output from the pMOS transistor 42 is $I_d = V_{dd}/\alpha R$, whereby the precision of the target saturation current value I_d can be further increased by adjusting the coefficient α even if the resistance value R of the resistor 34 itself varies.

FIG. 9(b) shows a configuration of a constant current generation circuit in which the constant current I_d can be adjusted by the current ratio A between two pMOS transistors 41 and 42'. The size ratio between the gate widths W of the two pMOS transistors 41 and 42' is set to be $1:A$, where the coefficient A is adjustable. Therefore, the constant current value I_d output from the pMOS transistor 42' whose gate width W is adjustable is $I_d = A \cdot V_{dd}/R$, whereby the precision of the target saturation current value I_d can be further increased by adjusting the coefficient A even if the resistance value R of the resistor 31 itself varies. The two pMOS transistors 41 and 42' having the current ratio A together form an adjustment circuit 90 for reducing the variations in the constant current value.

With the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3, a method in which the saturation current value I_{ds} of a MOS transistor used in the main circuit 2 is converted to a voltage has been described. However, constantly passing a current flow of a few mA through the MOS transistor of the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3 is electrically disadvantageous and is undesirable in terms of aging. What is important to the current-voltage conversion circuit of the present invention is that when the predetermined target saturation current value is decided, the substrate voltage-operating power supply voltage

(V_b-V_{dd}) characteristics of the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2 and the V_b-V_d characteristics of the current-voltage conversion circuit are made substantially the same against variations in various factors.

FIG. 11(a) and FIG. 11(b) each show characteristics required for the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3. FIG. 11(a) shows the relationship between the substrate potential V_{bn} of the nMOS transistor of the main circuit 2 and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} where the target saturation current value $I_{ds}(n)$ is constant. The symbol "a" denotes characteristics where the threshold voltage V_t from Expression 3 above is large, the value $\mu C_{ox}(W/L)$ is small or the temperature is high, the symbol "b" denotes characteristics where the threshold voltage V_t from Expression 3 above is medium, the value $\mu C_{ox}(W/L)$ is medium or the temperature is medium, and the symbol "c" denotes characteristics where the threshold voltage V_t from Expression 3 above is low, the value $\mu C_{ox}(W/L)$ is large or the temperature is low. It is indicated that for the predetermined operating power supply voltage V_{dd} , the substrate potential V_{bn} needs to be controlled within the range of V_- to V_+ against variations in various factors.

FIG. 11(b) shows the relationship between the substrate potential V_{bn} of the nMOS transistor provided in the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3 and the output converted voltage V_{dn} where the target saturation current I_{dn} is constant, indicating that it is sufficient that characteristics similar to those of FIG. 11(a) are realized against variations in various factors. Thus, for the predetermined converted voltage V_{dn} ($V_{dn}=V_{dd}$), it is sufficient that the substrate potential V_{bn} is controlled to be in the range of V_- to V_+ against variations in various factors.

Thus, the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3 may be substituted with the configurations shown in FIG. 10(b) and FIG. 10(c).

FIG. 10(a) shows again the current-voltage conversion circuit 1n-3, which is also shown in FIG. 5. The configuration of the current-voltage conversion circuit 1-3 is

not limited to any particular configuration as long as it is the circuit configuration of FIG. 10(a), i.e., a configuration capable of substantially realizing the V_{bn} - V_{dn} characteristics against variations in various factors as shown in FIG. 11(a).

The saturation current characteristics of a MOS transistor are also dependent on the value (W/L) as indicated by Expression 3. Therefore, where the original target saturation current value is $I_{ds}(n)$, even if the target saturation current value I_{ds} where the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} is a constant value is changed to $I_{ds}=(1/10)I_{ds}(n)$ by multiplying the gate length L of the MOS transistor of the current-voltage conversion circuit 1n-3 by a factor of 10, i.e., from the original value of $0.13\ \mu\text{m}$ to $1.3\ \mu\text{m}$, the V_{bn} - V_{dn} characteristics of the current-voltage conversion circuit 1n-3 do not change, whereby I_{ds} can be used instead of $(1/10)I_{ds}(n)$. Note however that since the relative precisions against variations in (W/L) are different, it is preferred in terms of characteristics that the effective gate length L is set to $L=1.3\ \mu\text{m}$ where 10 nMOS transistors 71 to 74, ..., having a size of $3\ \mu\text{m}/0.13\ \mu\text{m}$ are stacked on one another as shown in FIG. 10(b). In practice, since the mobility μ varies due to differences in the current density, the characteristics may differ from the design characteristics of FIG. 10(a). In such a case, the characteristics can be substantially matched to each other by inserting a resistor 35 as shown in FIG. 10(c).

Next, FIG. 12(b) and FIG. 12(c) each show an exemplary circuit configuration of a current-voltage conversion circuit of a substrate potential control circuit for pMOS transistors. Each of these configurations includes 10 pMOS transistors 81 to 84, ..., stacked on one another. The behaviors of the circuits shown in these figures are similar to those of FIG. 10(b) and FIG. 10(c), and will not be further described below.

(Second Embodiment)

Next, a semiconductor integrated circuit according to the second embodiment of the present invention will be described.

FIG. 15 shows a general configuration of the semiconductor integrated circuit of the present embodiment. In the first embodiment shown in FIG. 1, the substrate potential control circuit 1 is provided so that variations in the saturation current value I_{ds} of a MOS transistor that determines the delay time τ shown in Expression 2 are themselves suppressed by controlling the substrate potential of the MOS transistor. In the present embodiment, the variations in the saturation current value I_{ds} are suppressed by controlling the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} supplied to the main circuit 2.

Specifically, in FIG. 15, reference numeral 10 denotes a power supply voltage control circuit that is receiving information on the target saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors included in the main circuit 2. The power supply voltage control circuit 10 controls the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 so that the actual saturation current of the MOS transistors in the main circuit 2 is equal to the given target saturation current value I_{ds} . The main circuit 2 may have an internal configuration as shown in FIG. 4, for example.

FIG. 16 shows an exemplary specific configuration of the power supply voltage control circuit 10. The semiconductor integrated circuit shown in FIG. 16 includes the power supply voltage control circuit 10 and the main circuit 2, as in FIG. 15. The power supply voltage control circuit 10 includes the constant current generation circuit 10-1, a power supply voltage generation circuit 10-2 and a current-voltage conversion circuit 10-3. The constant current generation circuit 10-1 outputs a constant current I_{ds} equal to the target saturation current value I_{ds} , and the constant current I_d is input to the current-voltage conversion circuit 10-3. The current-voltage conversion circuit 10-3 converts the constant current I_{ds} from the constant current generation circuit 10-1 to a voltage V_d and outputs the voltage V_d as a reference voltage to the power supply voltage generation circuit 10-2. The power supply voltage generation circuit 10-2 outputs, as the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} , a voltage having the same voltage value as the

reference voltage V_d from the current-voltage conversion circuit **10-3** while lowering the impedance thereof. The operating power supply voltage V_{dd} generated by the power supply voltage generation circuit **10-2** is supplied to the main circuit **2**.

Thus, in the present embodiment, the power supply voltage control circuit **10** controls the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit **2** so that the actual saturation current value of the MOS transistors in the main circuit **2** is always equal to the target saturation current value I_{ds} . Therefore, even if the mobility and the threshold voltage V_t of the MOS transistors in the main circuit **2** vary due to variations in the manufacturing process of the MOS transistors or changes in the temperature occur, variations in the operation speed of the MOS transistors of the main circuit **2** are effectively suppressed.

FIG. 17 shows a specific configuration of the power supply voltage control circuit **10**. A power supply voltage control circuit **10n** shown in the figure includes a constant current source (constant voltage generation circuit) **10n-1**, a current-voltage conversion circuit **10n-3** being an nMOS transistor **13n-1**, and a power supply voltage generation circuit **10n-2** being an operational amplifier. The nMOS transistor **13n-1** of the current-voltage conversion circuit **10n-3** is a transistor having the same characteristics as those of nMOS transistors (not shown) provided in the main circuit **2**. The constant current I_{dn} equal to the target saturation current value I_{ds} from the constant current source **10n-1** is converted by the current-voltage conversion circuit **10n-3** to the voltage V_{dn} , and the power supply voltage generation circuit **10n-2** supplies, as the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} , a voltage having the same voltage value as the voltage V_{dn} to the main circuit **2**. Since the power supply voltage control circuit **10n** includes the current-voltage conversion circuit **10n-3** being the nMOS transistor **13n-1**, the configuration is particularly effective in a case where a critical path is formed depending on the driving power of the nMOS transistors among all the MOS transistors of the main circuit **2**.

FIG. 18 shows another specific configuration of the power supply voltage control circuit 10 shown in FIG. 16, which is particularly effective in a case where a critical path is formed depending on the driving power of the pMOS transistors among all the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2.

Specifically, in a power supply voltage control circuit 10p shown in FIG. 18, a current-voltage conversion circuit 10p-3 is a pMOS transistor 13p-1 having the same characteristics as those of the pMOS transistors (not shown) provided in the main circuit 2. Other than this, the configuration is the same as that of the power supply voltage control circuit 10n shown in FIG. 17. Therefore, like elements are given like reference numerals with a suffix "p" and will not be further described below.

FIG. 19 shows still another specific configuration of the power supply voltage control circuit 10 shown in FIG. 16, which is particularly effective in a case where a critical path is formed depending on both the driving power of the nMOS transistors and that of the pMOS transistors among all the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2.

Specifically, in the power supply voltage control circuit 10p shown in FIG. 19, a current-voltage conversion circuit 10np-3 is a parallel circuit of an nMOS transistor 13n-1 and a pMOS transistor 13p-1 having the same characteristics as those of the nMOS and pMOS transistors (not shown) provided in the main circuit 2. In this case, a constant current I_{dnp} supplied from a constant current source 10np-1 is the sum of the constant current I_{dn} being equal to the target saturation current I_{dsn} of the nMOS transistor and the constant current I_{dp} being equal to the target saturation current I_{dsp} of the pMOS transistor, and the target saturation current value I_{ds} is the average value between the target saturation current values I_{dsn} and I_{dsp} of the nMOS and pMOS transistors 13n-1 and 13p-1. Other than this, the configuration is the same as that of the power supply voltage control circuit 10n shown in FIG. 17. Therefore, like elements are given like reference numerals with a suffix "np" and will not be further described below.

The configuration shown in FIG. 7(b) or FIG. 7(c) may be employed for the internal configurations of the constant current sources **10n-1**, **10p-1** and **10np-1** shown in FIG. 17 to FIG. 19. With these internal configurations, the relationship between the supplied constant current value I_d and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 can be a linear function as shown in FIG. 8(b) and FIG. 8(c). As can be seen from Expression 2 and Expression 5 above, with such a linear function relationship, the delay time τ can be fixed to a predetermined value, making the operation speed of the main circuit 2 stay at a constant value, independent of characteristics variations, including changes in the threshold voltage of the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2, changes in the temperature, or the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2. This allows for a design with a small margin for variations in the characteristics of the MOS transistors, changes in the temperature, etc., thus facilitating the design and increasing the production yield of shipped products. Moreover, as a design with a small margin is made possible, the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} of the main circuit 2 is set to a voltage that is determined in view of a small power supply margin. Therefore, unlike in the prior art, it is not necessary to set it to a high voltage taking into consideration a large margin in view of variations in the manufacturing process of MOS transistors, etc., whereby it is possible to make the main circuit 2 operate with an even lower operating power supply voltage V_{dd} and thus to reduce the power consumption.

Moreover, the configuration shown in FIG. 7(d), FIG. 9(a) or FIG. 9(b), for example, may be employed for the internal configurations of the constant current sources **10n-1**, **10p-1** and **10np-1**. With these internal configurations, the relationship between the target saturation current value I_{ds} of the MOS transistors of the main circuit 2 and the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} for each operating power supply voltage range corresponding to one operation mode of the main circuit 2 can be a linear function as shown in FIG. 8(d), with the gradient of the linear function being different for each

operating power supply voltage range of the main circuit 2. In such a case, since the operating power supply voltage V_{dd} taking into consideration only a small power supply margin can be used for each operation mode of the main circuit 2, the main circuit 2 can operate at a lower voltage in all operation modes, whereby it is possible to further reduce the power consumption.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

As described above, according to the present invention, the actual saturation current value of the MOS transistors of the main circuit is controlled to be equal to a target saturation current value, whereby it is possible to suppress variations in the operation of the main circuit, irrespective of variations in the manufacturing process of the MOS transistors such as the threshold voltage, the gate capacitance per unit area and the W/L ratio or changes in the ambient temperature. Thus, the present invention is useful for providing, for example, semiconductor integrated circuits with an improved production yield and an improved operation speed.